

Friends

by Josephine

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Summary: An old friend comes to Plumfield... to stay

Friends

Title: Friends Author: Josephine Email: tobias145@hotmail.com

Category: Jo and Nick Spoilers: None, except in this, Jo and Nick are sort of courting and a bit from Little Women Disclaimer: None of the characters except Jack and Harold belong to me. They belong to Little Men the TV show and PAX tv. all the people associated with the show. And, also to Louisa May Alcott! Summary: An old friend comes to Plumfield... to stay.

Friends by, Josephine

Part One

Nick handed Jo the mail he had picked up in town. She thanked him, and absentmindedly shuffled through the envelopes. At the last, her eyes widened and she opened it. She scanned the letter's contents till the end. She grinned and re-folded the letter. Nick still stood there, feeling somewhat awkward.

"Oh, Nick, you're still hereâ€¦|" Jo trailed off.

"Was there anything in particular that needed fixing'?" he asked.

"Actually, the door on the guest room was something amiss. We're going to be needing it, Jack's coming." Her face split with a huge smile.

Nick was generally curious about Jack, but held his questions in, saving them until later. He headed upstairs.

Jo jumped out of her seat and ran into the kitchen. She hugged Asia,

was startled. "Jack's coming, you better make sure there's enough food. Oh, I'm so excited!" Jo breezed by leaving Asia completely bewildered.

(Note: okay readers, this is a direct homage to Ms. Alcott, in a passage from Little Women.)

As young people like to know "how people look," we will take this moment to give them a little scetch of the persons living at Plumfield. Josephine Bhaer (formerly Josephine March) has by now grown into her height and looks quite lovely. Her shoulder length brown hair curls nicely, and complements her smooth face and brown eyes. Her husband Fritz died about two years ago, and Jo was left alone with a young son, Rob, and a small school being run from Plumfield. Nick Riley was hired to help out with repairs around the school and grounds. Nick has longish light brown hair and warm, funloving eyes. Asia is Jo's friend and cook. Her brown skin glows each time she smiles.

Each of the children at the school have seperate identitys as well as looks. One of the two girls at the school is Bess, Jo's sister Amy's daughter. Bess has long blond curly hair and is very prim. When she was little everyone refered to her as "the Princess". Jo convinced Amy and Laurie to let Bess join the school after assuring them it was fit for girls. The other girl is Nan, who is the exact opposite of Bess. She has short red hair and a temper and will to match. She is determined to be a doctor or scientist when she grwos older. Her mother died and her father, not seeing any other option, sent her to Plumfield to be the first girl there. Before Nan, Plumfield had been a strictly boys' school, but finances moved Jo to consider more students.

Dan, one of the first at Plumfield, really looks up to Nick. He is a very handsome young man, with a smile-ready mouth and intellegent eyes. He is one of the few orphans at Plumfield, being sponsered by Mr. Lawrence, Bess's father. Nat is Dan's best friend. He is a more quiet, studious boy and loves to play violin. He is the newest boy, but blends in very well. As Dan likes Bess, Nat likes . Nan, but, I'm afraid, she sees him more as a friend.

The others boys are Rob, Jo's son, who is about six years old, a tow-headed boy who's pnyl goals are to be included with the bigger boys and to find favor with his mother. Emil escaped to the school from army camp and an abusive realtionship with his \_\_\_\_\_. Tommy is an accident prone boy, who always manages to break something, or do something wrong, but the other students and Mrs. Jo love him in spite, or because of it. Jack is a rather lanky boy with a tendancy to pick on those smaller than him.

The only animals around Plumfield are Jo's horse, Penny, and the collie, Max.

\* \* \*

Jacqueline Forester, known to all her friends as Jack, packed her two bags full of essentials.

"Harold," she called to her husband. "Where are the candlesticks?"

"In the kitchen, like always, stop bothering me, woman!" His gruff voice filtered under the study doors.

She swiftly moved to gather them. They had been one of her wedding gifts. Now that Harold was divorcing her, he would no longer need them. Sure, she would miss him, but this had been a long time coming. Jack certainly would not miss his drunken bouts and beatings.

The only person she could think to turn to was Jo. They had been friends since they were little girls, held together by their nicknames. Josephine and Jacqueline were both mouthfuls. They had been the tomboys of the school, even more so when they had both gotten their haircut, Jack in sympathy of Jo who had to. All the little March girls had been so kind to her, especially Jo and Beth. Oh, Beth, she ached for her memory.

Jack had finished packing. "Harold, I'm leaving."

He emerged from the study to hug her goodbye. "I'll let you know when the papers get through. Take care of yourself." He didn't know what else to say.

"I'll miss you, Harold. Goodbye." Jack kissed his cheek and left.

\* \* \*

By now everyone in Plumfield had heard news of Jack's coming arrival. And no one knew what to make of it. Dan, Nat, Bess, and Nan were in the sitting room playing checkers.

Jo burst into the room. "Jack should be here in fifteen minutes!" She smiled hugely.

Just as soon as she had appeared, she was gone, leaving them staring at one another.

\* \* \*

Jack had been to Plumfield only a few times, but now it felt completely different. Before she had been younger, and unmarried. Now, she was being divorced, and she was pregnant.

Her thick brown hair was longer, and her green eyes fearful, although she tried her best to hid it. Her dresses didn't quite fit; she was just beginning to show around the middle.

Jack reached the door, and she drew a shuddery breath, before knocking on the wooden door. She tried to balance her bags in her left hand, and fix her hair with the other. On the way, the wind had blown it askew. She heard faint footsteps and excited voices on the other side of the door. "I'll get it." A masculine voice said to the voices.

Nick opened the door slowly, just to aggravate Jo who was hovering around him like a nervous hen. He looked up and out to the porch. He saw the young woman standing outside. She was really about the same age as Jo, but more petite, so she looked younger. Jo smiled and ushered her in.

"Everyone, this is Jacqueline Farbester, but you all can call her

Jack." Nick choked, and Jo turned to him, suprized. He looked at he and his eyes said, 'later'. Jack was quickly surrounded by the children and the room filled with 'hello's and 'glad to meet you's. Jo moved out of the immediate crowd to talk with Nick.

"What's wrong?" Jo asked.

"You never mentioned the fact that Jack was a girl." Nick said, rather embarrassed. Jo smiled mockingly.

"So, I had you worried, huh?"

"No. Well, maybe a little."

"Good." Jo leaned in and kissed Nick's nose in a teasing manner.

"I bet you didn't know I knew that you were ticklish, Jo?" He swiftly grabbed her around the waist and she squealed in an effort not to scream with glee. Every one of the children and Jack turned to face the now blushing pair.

"Let's all have dinner!" Jo said, not quite covering for her embarrassment. Nick gave her a discrete smile. Jo and Nick was the last to go into the dining room. "Don't you ever do that again, Nick Riley!" She whispered forcefully.

"And what if I do?" he asked, testing the grounds.

"Then I'd... have to tickle you back."

"How 'bout a kiss instead?" Nick couldn't hide his smile.

Jo shook her head, smiling. "Later."

\* \* \*

That night, Jo and Jack were sitting in Jo's room catching up. "You didn't tell me you were pregnant, Jack."

"I know, I guess I was hoping you wouldn't notice."

"I would have noticed eventually. You are staying at least the year, aren't you? You can help me teach." Jo knew how Jack hated handouts.

"Yesâ€¦ You didn't tell me you and Nick were courting."

"I was hoping you wouldn't notice, just kidding. I guess, I didn't think it would matter that much."

"Oh, Jo." Jack shook her head. "You know I'm over-joyed for you. You don't have to feel guilty."

"I'm that obvious, am I? Oh, well. I'm excited about your baby too." Jo smiled eager to have another little one around Plumfield. "We'd better get some rest, we do have to teach in the morning."

Jack whole-heartedly agreed.

Part Two A Week Later... Jo awoke feeling quite lethargic and the

urge to stay in bed was very strong. There was a tickle at the back of her throat, and she coughed. Oh, no... I'm not sick... am I? she thought, sniffing, and rubbing her eyes childishly. Well, if I'm sick, then I don't have to teach... But I love the children. .. But it's so warm, and snuggly right here... Jo's eyes drifted closed and she fell back into sleep.

\* \* \*

Jack swiftly got dressed, eager for the new day to start, and to be teaching again. She smiled at the full length mirror, and straightened the folds of her simple frock and apron. Her hair hung down her back, curly and half done up in a green ribbon that matched her eyes. Her stomach growled astonishingly loud, and reminded her that breakfast was waiting. She stepped out into the hall and noticed that Jo's door was still closed. Curiosity got the better of her, and she knocked softly. When she heard no reply, she cracked open the door, and peeked inside.

Jo lay asleep under the covers, turning fitfully every other moment. Jack stepped forward and lay her hand across Jo's forehead.

"Oh, Goodness, she's got a fever." she muttered, and left the room, letting Jo sleep.

\* \* \*

Nick sat at the table with the children, drinking his coffee. He watched as Jack came down the stairs. "Mornin' Miss Farbester."

She looked up, startled. "Oh, hello, Mr. Riley. Please, call me Jack."

"Alright." He nodded. "You just call me Nick from now on then, Jack."

She smiled slightly, a tense tugging at the corners of her mouth. "Jo's still upstairs, she's sick."

Immidaitely, Nick became serious. Jack saw his devotion for Jo and longed for that kind of a relationship, the kind that had never really been possible with Harold. "She has a fever, I was just on my way down to see if Asia had any medicine around."

"Let me check for you." He rushed into the kitchen where Asia was putting the finishing touches on breakfast. "Jo's sick," he said. "She has a fever. Do ya have any medicine she could take?"

"Oh, I'm sure it's around here somewhere, just give me a minute."

\* \* \*

The children looked up at Jack. "Mrs. Jo's sick?" Nan asked.

"Yes, I'm afraid I will just have to teach you alone today." She smiled.

"Do ya think, maybe, in school we could make somethin' to make Mrs. Jo feel better?" Dan suggested sweetly. The others nodded enthusiastically.

"Well, I'm hardly one to step in the toes of creativitly. Be my guest."

Asia spept through the room. "You children will just have to bet breakfast by yourselves, I gotta go play nurse." She flashed a quick, but tense smile and she was gone.

"Gosh, I hope Mrs. Jo is alright." Nan expressed the feelings of all those in the room.

\* \* \*

The children each sat at their desk talking softly and cutting out card designs for their very ill teacher. Jack sat at the front, at Jo's desk and brushed her hair back, feeling quite worn out and useless. The rational part of her mind told her that she was helping out just by teaching the children, but she still wished she could do something more.

Soemone knocked on the schoolhouse door and the door slid open. Nick stepped inside, taking his leather coyboy hat off. "Jack," he nodded in acknowledgment. "I was thinkin' ya might be needin' my help."

She smiled. She knew exactly how he felt. "Sure, Nick," she motioned for him to come closer. "Looks like Tommy needs some help." They both looked across the room, where Tommy had quite buried himself in mess-ups. A smile pulled at Nick's mouth.

"I'll see if there's somethin' I can do." He stepped over to Tommy's desk.

Jack began to drift off into daydreams of her childhood...

Jack trudged down the side of the road, pulling her coat tighter around her. She looked up too late, she had already bumped into the figure comming in her direction. The other pedestrian looked up and Jack recognized her at once. "Jo??"

"Hello, Jack. Haven't seen you in a while, well... Christopher Colombus! I've got to go!" She quickened her pace, and in doing so her cap fell off.

"Jo! You're hair! What happened?" Jack asked, quite shocked.

"I got it cut... for the money." Jack took great pleasure in knowing that Jo would only reveal her motives to those very close to her. She was too prideful.

"Well, it looks beautiful, Jo. Perfectly sutis you!" At that moment, an idea popped into Jack's head, and she smiled. "Well, I must be going, I will see you tommorow."

"Alright." Jo smiled. "Oh, blast! I'm going to be late to Aunt March's!"

\* \* \*

Jack knocked on the door of Orchard House, and as she expected Jo

answered. "Come on in."

She stepped inside, and removed her cap, letting Jo see the hair had been shopped off just below her ears, to match Jo's.

"Oh, Jack. You're hair!"

"I love it, and now we match!"

"Excuse me, Jack?"

\* \* \*

"Excuse me, Jack?" She opened her eyes and was quite alarmed to see Nick looking worriedly down at her.

"Oh, sorry, I guess I was just daydreaming."

"It's time for chores. School's over, I already dismissed the kids for ya."

"Thank you, Nick. I guess I'd better be heading inside them." She stood up, and put together the books she had been using to teach.

"I should be supervisin' 'em with their chores. See ya at dinner." He again tipped his hat to her and left the barn. She quickly followed. She walked briskly across the lawn to Plumfield. She paused to set her books down, but them quickly made for Jo's room to check on her. It had been a long, hard day, knowing she had been inside suffering.

"Jack?" Mrs. Jo's voice cracked. Her face was flushed with the fever, and her lips were dry.

"Hello, Jo. How are you feeling?" Jack made her way to the bedside to care for Jo.

Jo's eyes rolled, and her hand flopped uselessly by her side. "Sick. How were the kids?"

"They were angels, except for that Tommy, he's a disaster." Jack pressed the cold damp cloth against Jo's forehead.

Jo laughed huskily, but it turned into a cough. She layed her head back on the pillows and closed her eyes. "Tell them I'll be better tommorow. I'm already on the mend."

Jack bit her lip and didn't argue.

\* \* \* Two days later

"Oh, Doctor, I'm so glad you came. She's upstairs, this way." Asia led Doctor \_\_\_\_\_ up the stair to Jo's room, and opened the door. Jack was dutifully caring for Jo, as usual.

"Why didn't you call me sooner?" Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ asked.

"I... don't need... a doctor..." Jo coughed.

"We've been so busy we didn't have time, and that," Jack pointed at Jo.

"I'm... fine."

Jack walked up to the doctor and whispered so Jo wouldn't hear. "She thinks she is getting better, she wouldn't even hear talk of a doctor untill today, Nick convinced her after a long talk."

"I'll need to take her to my office, so no one else catches it. Wash everything she might have touched. Asia, go get Nick to help me carry her to my wagon."

The doctor poured some medicine down Mrs. Jo's throat, and Asia went for Nick. Jack looked at Jo, and then back at the doctor. "What does she have?"

"Just a bad flu."

Jack could tell he wasn't telling her the whole truth.

\* \* \*

Nick ended up carrying Jo to the wagon by himself. The children watched the carriage leave from the windows, each mind greatly troubled, and making up the most horrible scenarios. Nan wished she could be the one to nurse Mrs. Jo back to health, it would only cut into the great debt that Jo had created for the children, so impacting their lives, they could not envision life without her.

She was at the doctor's for a week, and Jack and Nick checked on her every day, sometimes more than that, they didn't really worry about getting sick, since they had already been exposed. Jo did not improve. She didn't even talk now, it was too much work for her throat, and she couldn't eat anything, since she would quickly vomit. She was undernourished, and her body was dying.

The eighth day, Jack and Nick arrived at the doctors midmorning, Jo's body was still and they feared she was already dead, but for her small but steady breaths. She was just hanging back now, she was mostly gone. Jack took her hand, and began to speak to Jo, although she never answered anymore. Jo's eyes tracked Jack's face, and tried to speak.

"Ja- I... take care... \*cough\* of... the chil-." Jo closed her eyes, and sighed weezilly.

"No, Jo, you're going to take care of them, you're going to get better, I know it. You have to." A tear splashed from Jack's eyes onto Jo's hand.

"Nick... I- I lo... ve you... Good... bye..." Jo blinked for the last time, and a wind swept through the room. The tears fell stronger now, from Jack and Nick. They one they had both loved so dearly... It was too much to bear.

Part Three Epilogue Each of the children with families was sent home, the thought of running Plumfield without Jo, the only light, was unthinkable, at least for a time. Everyone wore black, inside and



out. Dan and Nat were the only ones left. Amy, Laurie, Bess and Meg were staying at Plumfield to be together in their grief. Marmee and Father were also there, consumed with grief. A defening scilence seemed to cover the whole world, especially now that Jack was sick. Everyone was worried for her life as could have been expected, considering the past experince. But, as raw pain was worn out, a numbness filled those in the house and they were like hollow beings without life, as they had been after beth died.

Jack willingly gave herself to the disease, irrationally thinking she could at least join Jo. But, the doctor had developed a medicine, only just too late to save Jo. Jack slowly got better, but her heart became more distraught. Slowly each family member returned home, less alive than they had been for Jo had taken a huge part of each of their hearts with her when she had died.

Nick, Nat, and Dan found consolidation only in each other's company. Through many tearful sessions they had shared the memories of Mrs. Jo. Rob was staying with Meg, everyone preverred it that way, it would have been too horrible to watch the small boy, orphaned, struggle to deal with the overwhelming grief that filled them all. Asia had returned to her family, feeling that the memories there were too much to deal with.

Every pillow, and hallway smelled of her, she filled each of their dreams, and she would live forever in the house and in the hearts of those who had known her. Though she had never had a chance to realze it, Mrs. Jo Bhaer had left a legacy, those who had known her would be forever changed.

Jack would never completely heal and her heart asked her each day why she would be let to live, and not her dear friend. Her daughter became a teacher, determined to carry on the Plumfield school. Bess and Nan returned to help younger Carolyn run it.

Nick never married, Dan and Nat stayed with him, working odd jobs for money, and finding pleasure in their small family. Two years later, Nick officially adopted the boys.

When Rob was older, he wrote a book about his life. He had surely gotten his mother's writing ability, because it was a hit, people were touched by the raw emotion that flowed from the words her put on paper. He wrote other books, which also sold well, but none impacted lives like his first work. No one after Jo has died from that mysterious disease, the doctor's cure, surely assisted by Jo's memory, never failed.

End  
file.